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ABRAHAM LINCOLN

A TRIBUTE

DELIVERED, FEBRUARY 14, 1909, UPON THE OCCASION
OF A SPECIAL MEMORIAL SERVICE,

BY

REV. JAMES W. LEE, D.D.

PASTOR, TRINITY METHODIST EPISCOPAL CHURCH SOUTH,
ATLANTA, GA.

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INTRODUCTORY.

To celebrate the centenary of the birth of Abraham Lincoln, a special memorial service was held in Trinity Methodist Episcopal Church, Atlanta, Ga., on the evening of Sunday, February 14, 1909.

This same City of Atlanta—the scene of this unique service—had been reduced to ashes just forty-five years ago by a division of the Federal Army which looked to Lincoln as its Commander-in-Chief.

The Memorial Service was presided over by an officer of the Grand Army of the Republic, while seated upon the platform and also uniting in the service was the Commander-in-Chief of the United Confederate Veterans.

A newspaper account of this service was sent to Hon. Robert T. Lincoln, who wrote in acknowledgment as follows :

“CHICAGO, Ill., Feb. 20, 1909.

“ 60 Lake Shore Drive.

“MY DEAR SIR :

“I thank you very heartily for your kindness in sending me the report of the memorial service in Trinity Church upon the anniversary of my father's birth. None of the occurrences of last week have affected me so much

as this meeting, as an indication of the realization of the hopes which I think guided every act of his while President. It is dramatic that this proof should come from a city destroyed by one of the armies under his supreme command and be presented by Confederate soldiers, listening with approval to an address of such eloquence and patriotic feeling as yours. As his son, I am very grateful for the meeting and more than grateful for your distinguished part in it.

“As General Scully spoke of the Gettysburg address and of the circumstances under which he thought it was written, I think you will be interested in knowing the facts about it, as related by my father’s Secretary, Mr. Nicolay, and I am therefore sending to you a re-print of an article written by Mr. Nicolay in 1894. From it you will see that my father probably wrote a short address before the beginning of the journey and only changed it slightly just before its delivery. I think it improbable that he could have secured a minute to himself in his car filled with people even to reflect as to his words for the next day. Renewing to you the assurances of my grateful feelings,

“I am

“Very sincerely yours,

(Signed) “ROBERT T. LINCOLN.”

THE REV. JAMES W. LEE, D.D.,
Atlanta, Ga.

PROGRAM.

SERVICE IN TRINITY METHODIST EPISCOPAL CHURCH, SOUTH,
SUNDAY EVENING, FEBRUARY 14, 1909.

D. I. Carson, chaplain of O. M. Mitchel Post No. 1,
Grand Army of the Republic, presiding.

Organ prelude.

Music—Choir of Trinity Church.

Reading the Scripture—Rev. A. F. Sherrill, D.D.,
dean of Atlanta Theological Seminary.

Prayer—General Clement A. Evans, commander-in-
chief United Confederate Veterans.

Reading—Mr. Lincoln's Favorite Poem, "O, Why
Should the Spirit of Mortal be Proud?"—Colonel T. H.
Jones, camp A, Wheeler's cavalry.

Reading—Mr. Lincoln's Gettysburg Address, Brig-
adier General A. J. Scully, United States Army, retired.

Address—Rev. J. W. Lee, D.D.

Hymn, "My Country 'Tis of Thee"—Congregation.

ABRAHAM LINCOLN,

ADDRESS BY REV. JAMES W. LEE, D.D., PASTOR OF TRINITY
METHODIST EPISCOPAL CHURCH, SOUTH.

“All things work together for good to them who love God, to them who are called according to His purpose.”—Romans xiii., 28.

IN his essay on German literature, Thomas Carlyle declares that “there is a divine idea pervading the visible universe; which visible universe is indeed but its symbol and sensible manifestation, having in itself no meaning or even true existence independent of it. To the mass of men this divine idea lies hidden; yet to discern it and seize it and live wholly in it is the condition of all genuine virtue, knowledge, freedom and the end, therefore, of all spiritual effort in every age.”

This is the interpretation given by a master in literature of the words of the text. The machinery of the universe works for good to all those who discern and seize and wholly live in the divine idea at its heart. Here we have a principle by which to account for the continuous activity and influence of every great man in history. The universal order publishes larger and larger editions of the men who discern and seize and wholly live in the divine idea history is gradually unfolding. Because of this, newly-bound copies of Abraham and Moses and Isaiah and St. Paul are issued by the wheel work of the centuries for the readers of every passing age. Those who are the called according to His purpose are such as yield to the pressure of the eternal intention of the Almighty and expend their spiritual efforts in the direction it urges.

I.

The contemporaries of a distinguished man can not know the place he is to take in history. They are too close to him to see all there is of him if he be really great, and too near to quite measure his diminutiveness if his prominence be due to the accidents of external estate or official position. A time exposure of nearly eight centuries was required for Sabatier to get the picture he took of St. Francis and published in his "Life of St. Francis of Assisi."

The clouds that fall upon their graves close the careers of the rank and file of men. It is only now and then that one of our race appears on the planet with wealth of being stored in his soul too great to be locked inside a tomb, who lives again, not only in eternity, but throughout all time:

"In minds made better by their presence, live
 In pulses stirred to generosity,
 In deeds of daring rectitude, in scorn
 Of miserable aims that end with self,
 In thoughts sublime that pierce the night-like stars,
 And with their mild persistence urge man's search
 To vaster issues."

Such a man was Abraham Lincoln.

II.

His mortal remains were consigned to their last resting place forty-four years ago, but the further away we get from the day of his funeral and from the few feet of ground enriched by his sleeping dust, the more clearly is it understood that there was little of Lincoln John Wilkes Booth was able to kill, and a very small part of him his loved ones were able to bury.

Lincoln belonged to that class of men who learn in consecrated service the secret of the resurrection, and who discover and practice the method of finding themselves for this world and the next, by losing themselves before they cease to breathe. Lincoln did not wait for the judgment trump of the last day to call him from the dead. While alive in the flesh, he conformed to eternal principles and by them was transformed into an incorruptible citizen of all the ages.

III.

Not by any process of analysis can one determine the particular gift, or power, or accomplishment, it was in Lincoln that won for him the favor of the years. It is well known that time can neither be flattered nor bribed. Not without good reason are favors shown this mortal or that by the tearless order of the flying suns. When the centuries are found conspiring to augment the worth and fame of a man, it may be known absolutely, that he was of value, beyond the capacity of the time in which he lived to express. It is the habit of the universe, always and everywhere, to mete out to every one exact justice. When, therefore, we see the investment a person makes of himself in his own age, constantly drawing large instalments of interest in succeeding times, we may know that he failed to get all that was due him while he lived. The contemporaries of Bruno did not appreciate him sufficiently to grant him standing room during his natural life. They burnt him on the Campo dei Fiori in the city of Rome. But in four hundred years, the life capital he left had so increased in value that his countrymen found the amount large enough to build him a monument, which now

stands in the neighborhood of the spot from which he started to heaven in a chariot of flame four centuries ago.

IV.

Abraham Lincoln has grown more during the years that have elapsed since he was assassinated than any other man of all history ever did in a half century after his death. It took four hundred years in the case of Bruno to convert his pyre into his monument, but it has taken only fifty years in the case of Lincoln to convert the bullet of his assassin into many shafts of marble, and into as many monuments of affection as there are hearts beating in the breasts of civilized human beings.

V.

How are we to account for this subtle, intangible, growing personal reality, rising round us like an atmosphere, we represent to ourselves by the name of Lincoln? It was not his statesmanship. Hamilton was a more brilliant master of the structure and functions of government. It was not his oratory. He never reached the level of magnetic speech perpetually maintained by Webster. It was not simply his gift of boundless common sense. In this respect, Benjamin Franklin was his equal. It was not his devotion to the cause of abolition simply. Wendell Phillips and William Lloyd Garrison did more to create and direct the moral conviction that gave to the slaves their freedom. It was not merely because he was the chief executive of the republic during the stormiest period of the national history, and managed to conduct it through the most terrific civil war ever waged. There were others who might have guided the ship of state through the storms that imperiled its

existence. We must look deeper than his words, deeper than his deeds, deeper than the official position he held, to find the source of Lincoln.

VI.

In the words of the text, "All things work together for good to them that love God." And in the interpretation of these words by Carlyle, we find the principle by the aid of which we can account for Lincoln, and for every other man whose name the passing ages can not blot from the memory of our race. Whoever in any age discerns and seizes and wholly lives in the divine idea history is unfolding insures the publication of himself in larger and larger volumes with every clearer and completer expression of that idea.

VII.

Plato discerned and seized and wholly lived in the divine idea it is the function of philosophy to interpret, hence speculative thinkers for twenty-five centuries have kept his work fresh in the memory of thoughtful men. Copernicus wholly lived in the divine idea expressed in the constellations, and henceforth the morning stars can never sing together without magnifying the glory of his genius. Darwin, born the same year, the same month and the same day with Lincoln, identified himself wholly with the divine idea expressed in the method of creation, hence all nature, through its flowers and through its birds, will never cease to fill the sky with perfume and melody in honor of his achievements. The divine idea Lincoln wholly lived in was not the intellectual aspects of it, with which speculative thought

is concerned; nor the biological aspects of it with which naturalists are concerned; nor the mechanical aspects of it, with which astronomers are concerned; but it was the distinctly human aspects of it, with which lovers and martyrs and heroes are concerned. The universities will guard the fortunes of Plato; the observatories will keep fresh the memory of Copernicus; the naturalists will take care of the interests of Darwin, but humanity, aching, struggling, suffering, despairing, triumphing, will recount to itself over and over again, until the last page of human history is written, the courage, the patience, the pity and the sacrifice of Lincoln. The poor belated negroes, slaves to petty kings in Africa, slaves to humane masters in America, but nevertheless slaves, until Lincoln, by a stroke of the pen, knocked the shackles from off their limbs, will never cease, in time nor eternity, to lift their dark faces in gratitude to him as to their savior from bondage.

VIII.

Soldiers in blue, and soldiers in gray, more of whom now march amid the hills of day than drag their weary feet over the scenes of conflict, are able to see, by the light of a larger, sweeter time, territory sufficient of the heart of Lincoln for all brave men to stand and love, and the armies of Grant and the armies of Lee, now, thank God, united on earth and united in heaven, will both regard the martyred president as their commander-in-chief to all eternity. The sections have learned in fifty years that it is better to convert their energies into the flying shuttles of commerce to weave the people together than it is to turn them into minie balls to shoot the people apart. No man's future is safer for the time to come than that of Abraham Lincoln.

He wholly lived in the divine idea at the bottom of the American union. He identified himself with the central current of our national life. We can not move toward the fulfillment of our destiny as a people without perpetually witnessing the spirit of Lincoln, accompanying us, like a pillar of cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night. The greater we become as a power among the nations, the wider becomes the scope of our commerce, the stronger becomes our influence for unity, world-wide and universal, the greater and wider and stronger will become Lincoln, who sought in his life to harmonize a divided people, and dying left a legacy of sympathy and tenderness and sacrifice which, by its "mild persistence," has re-united forever in the bonds of undying love the members of the national household.

IX.

It would not be true to say that Lincoln was superior in this or that respect to all other men who lived in our country between the years of 1809 and 1865. But it is true that he, more than any other, charged with the responsibility of national affairs, did discern and seize and wholly live in the divine idea it seems to be the purpose of Providence to realize through these United States. It was his complete conformity to the central purpose of this nation, as he had light to see it, that gives him his unique and growing place in history.

X.

The men for whose good the machinery of the universe works and whose lives it republishes with every revolution of its wheelwork, are not always the strongest men in intellectual endowment or administrative ability.

Nero had, perhaps, had as much or more native ability than Saint Paul, but Nero threw himself across the purpose of God, and was ground to powder by it, while Saint Paul directed his life parallel with it, and hence lives in larger and larger measure with the gradual unfolding of the divine purpose. Napoleon was a much greater force than Wellington, but Napoleon was left discomfited and broken by the roadway of events, while Wellington was chosen to move on down the years at the head of his invincible columns. Herbert Spencer had intellectual ability equal to that of Hegel, but the English thinker built his system across the track of advancing thought, and had the sorrow of seeing it smashed by the enginry of things, before he died, while the German thinker, lifting up his system parallel with the universal order, and hitched to the purpose at its center, will enjoy the happiness of perpetually teaching the human mind.

XI.

It often happens that the noblest men discern and seize and wholly live in an idea, they take to be divine, but which, when subjected to the test of time, turns out to lead away from the track of history. The real test, therefore, of the greatness of one who has played a prominent part on the stage of human affairs, is this: how completely did he discern and build upon an idea moving toward realization in the eternities. A great and consecrated man may choose a promising idea, and upon it as a foundation, build of gold, or silver, or precious stones, or wood, or hay, or stubble, but inevitably the day of Judgment comes, and then his work is made manifest, for the day shall declare it. Every man's work is tried, and it is known in every case, finally, of

what sort it is. If a man's work abide which he hath built upon an eternal foundation, he shall receive a reward, both for his work and for the wisdom that guided him in choosing the right idea upon which to build. But if a good man's work shall be burnt because built on a wrong idea, he shall suffer the loss of all his effort in the performance of that work, but he himself shall be saved yet so as by fire.

Lincoln's work has stood the tests of fifty years of judgment days. It has been revealed through fire of what sort it was and is. He is now being rewarded both for his work and for the insight that led him to build on an eternal foundation. Those of us who left the union fifty years ago were just as good and great and consecrated as were those who remained in it. Our works, too, were of gold, and silver, and precious stones, but the idea we selected as a foundation upon which to build was not moving in the track of events. Our Southern Confederacy has been burnt, but the patriotism, devotion, consecration, which took form in its fading and passing fortunes, are forever safe. So great are we as a people that it has taken only fifty sad, heart-rending years, to bring us to a national level of good will, upon which it is in the hearts of all to give to the Confederates the same praise for their loyalty to what they believe to be right, and to cover their graves with flowers as deeply beautiful, as to those who fought on the side of victory and in the direction of the idea the the God of history is unfolding.

XII.

The people of this country, North and South, have come to a point of view, high enough above the level of fifty years ago, to appreciate the good and great men

on both sides of the question that separated them once into contending armies. Think of a service like this to-night, held in a city that was burnt to the ground forty-five years ago by order of the commander-in-chief of the Federal army, whose memory we meet here to honor. Nothing like it before ever took place in all history. It is a strange and great thing under the sun. To what unexpected heights is this movement toward fraternity and affection to move? How much higher are the waters of good will to rise? If they continue to climb they will finally reach the shores upon which New York and Boston are situated, so that a memorial service in honor of Jefferson Davis will be held in those quarters, where they once hated Mr. Davis as thoroughly as we did Mr. Lincoln. Let the waves of fraternity swell, until they shall cover every patch of territory and island that separated us.

Theodore Roosevelt, half Georgian and half Dutchman, now the best loved president who has occupied his exalted position since Washington, when a young man, referred to Jefferson Davis as the arch traitor, but recently upon his return from a hunting trip in Louisiana, congratulated the people of Mississippi for contributing to the country the illustrious name of Jefferson Davis, and praised them for the honors they had conferred upon that great man.

Charles Francis Adams, only a short time ago, made the frank statement that he was for a long time too prejudiced to read the life of Mr. Davis, but, finally, being led to do so, he declared that he found his character without a blemish.

The difference between Abraham Lincoln and Jefferson Davis was not that they were not both good and

great men, but the difference is that Mr. Lincoln took passage on a ship that will sail the seas of time forever, while Mr. Davis made the mistake of getting aboard a vessel that was wrecked, because out of the course mapped by Providence, as the destined way for the people of this country to voyage.

When the confederates left the sinking confederacy and walked up the gangway back into the magnificent ship upon which all our people began the voyage to the future the great captain was cold in death, but had he been alive he would have shared his last dollar and his last drop of heart's blood with the brave men who had been sailing in perilous seas, but who at length were coming back to the vessel we will all sail in to the shores of eternity.

XIII.

In his "Reminiscences of the Civil War," General John B. Gordon relates a touchingly beautiful incident, illustrative of the sentiment common deep down in their souls to the soldiers of both the Union and the Confederate armies. The Northern troops were on one side of the Rapidan River, and the Southern men were on the opposite hills of the other, when the stillness of the April twilight was suddenly broken by the notes of "Hail Columbia, Happy Land." In quick response to this volley of emotion from the Northern side of the river, the air was set to vibrating by the thrilling strains of "Dixie" from the Southern banks of the stream. Then, as if untouched by this exchange of sectional salutations, one lone volunteer, thinking, doubtless, of loved ones at home, lifted his voice into the immortal words of "Home, Sweet Home," when, as if moved from

Heaven, both armies lost sight of all points of the national compass, and without reference to who was right or who was wrong, without reference to flags of truce or terms of surrender, re-established on the spot, under the skies of Virginia, the American Union, by all getting together in the universal cadences, wrung from the lonely spirit of John Howard Payne.

Little did those brave men think, fifty years ago, when ceasing to swap lead long enough to do a little trading in sentiment, closing their transactions by all getting together in "Home, Sweet Home," that they were giving voice to prophecy, which those of us who meet here to-night have lived to see fulfilled. "Hail Columbia, Happy Land," is now domesticated in the South, and "Dixie" is tumultuously at home in the North.

Both purified from the flavor of sectionalism through the wondrous alembic of love are parts of the songful furnishment of every sweet home in the Union!

The underlying feelings at the bottom of brave hearts on the Rapidan have, through deepening experience of fifty years, made their way to the top of our hearts to-day. We are all back, not merely in song but in fact in the "Sweet National Home" of our fathers, and from thence, by the grace of God, we will never go any more.



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